

An Ethnographical Reflection on Pangwala Tribe

Dr. Rakesh Thakur¹ and Surender Singh²

¹Department of Sociology, Post Graduate Government College (PGGC), Sector-11, Chandigarh

²Research Scholar, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Panjab University-
Chandigarh

Culture is socially acquired practices and thought. It is a ways of life, fashion, norms, values and even body language. Culture can be defined as socially established norms and pattern of behaviour. It can be defined as an emergence of cognitive pattern or ways of thinking and styles of life. The Pangwala cultural identity has survived through immemorial. It was the isolated place kept disconnected and uninterrupted due to its geographical location. The hard geographical settings made this area inaccessible and isolated. This region developed the social and cultural identity in a distinct way. The manifestation of cultural identity is quite sharp and visible. The people are deep rooted interconnected with their local tribal identity. The identity is mainly related with the distinct identity of the group. The thrust of the present paper is to capture and examine the cultural life of Pangwala tribe.

Key Words: Tribal Identity, Pangwala Identity, Cultural Identity, Traditionalism.

Date of Submission: 01-11-2022

Date of Acceptance: 10-11-2022

Geographical Location

Pangi Valley, a subdivision of Chamba district is the remote and inaccessible high-altitudinal region and one of the most beautiful valleys in the Northwest Himalaya. The Pangi valley, 1503 square kilometers is located in northern Himachal Pradesh and is touching with Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir. It is a division of Chamba District in the northern part of Himachal Pradesh, India, and has the lowest status in the hierarchy of administrative units. Physically, the area deals with the north-eastern part of the Chamba district and is confined on the north by spur known as Trishul Dhar, which separate it from the Paddar area of Jammu and Kashmir. On the south, there is a edge point joining Ghor Dhar Jot and running up to Dhandal Dhar, where it connects with the range of Pir Panjal. The eastern range touches with the Zanskar range of the main Himalayas. Pangi valley is located between Pir Panjal range and Great Himalayan range. There are two mountain ranges named great Himalayan and Pir Panjal range. Pangi Himalaya covers great mountain passes. High altitude and rocky mountain makes the valley highly unreachable. The valley contains mountain ranges with various altitudinal variations. Altitudes vary from 2200 to 6500 m, with the highest settlement situated at 3570 m.

These two ranges have been divided by Chandra Bhaga River. Chander Bhaga River is flowing south north direction. The larger part of right side of river is mostly occupied by the Great Himalyan range. The river Chandrabhaga runs through deep narrow gorges in the Pangi Valley. It originates from Baralacha glacier in Lahaul-Spiti, cuts a deep gorge creating a rocky valley fringed by two high mountain ranges, the Dhauladhar-Pirpanjal in the south and the Zanskar in the north. It arrives in Pangi Valley near Karu Nala. It forms Chenab when it joins the Marau River at Bhandera Kot, 12 km from Kishtwar town in Jammu and Kashmir. The Valley has been linked by road via Sach Pass at a height of 4,350m, the highest road in Himachal Pradesh. It is also the shortest way from Chamba to Killar (170 km) and is open for vehicular transportation between mid June and September, but it continued closed due to heavy snowfall at other times of the year. One can approach the Valley via Chamba-Manali-Killar (680 km) and Chamba-Jammu-Doda-Gulabgarh-Killar (570 km), but these are very long roads compared to the Chamba-Sach Pass- Killar route. The old trade ways still exist which links Pangi Valley to Ladakh of Zanskar range in the adjacent state of Jammu and Kashmir. Bus service is available on this road upto Tissa a distance of 40 miles. Rest of the distance has to be done, mostly on foot. The Sub Tehsil can be approached from Manali-Kullu side after crossing Rohtang Pass in Punjab Lauhal. Punjab Lauhal in fact forms the Eastern boundary of the Sub Tehsil. The 'third approach to the valley is via Kishtwar, where River Chandra Bhaga cuts a gulf in the Pangi Range of mountains and flows into Jammu and Kashmir territory. -A minor mountain stream creates the dividing line between J & K and Chamba on this side. Sursunk pass and

Shinkit pass connects the valley to Zansker. Tuani and Uргу pass connects the valley with Myar in Lahaul. There are major passes in this Pir Panjal range also. Sach pass has continued to be the only communication link between Pangi and Churah in the summer. Two passes named Chenni and Darati are only located in this middle range falling in Pangi valley. Chasag bhotori connects with Myar valley by crossing the guddhar pass. It connects the chasak bhotori area of Pangi with Lahaul.

Pangi valley is an isolated place from the rest of the world for about six months in a year. Heavy snowfall makes the living of the local people very hard in the valley. Throughout winter the movement of the people discontinues with in the valley. Since winter is very chilly and frosty and no outdoor activities are likely to perform for four to five months. The physical isolation, rocky terrain and cold climate have led for the appearance of typical culture. It is really hard task to trace the process of human setting in Pangi valley. There are different propositions on the identity of Pangwala. The first proposition is grounded on the belief that Rajput clan remained here during the period of Mughal and they went back to battle with Mughals leaving their family here secure. They did not come back from war and the females of the Rajput clan wedded with their servants. Many scholars have also demanded that this place was used as a home of punishment. At last political lawbreakers settled down here and married here. It is said mostly for the similarity and likeness of Pangwali tope with the prisoners. Other group can be considered as the people who came in search of cultivable land and pastures for animals. It is pointed by many local people that Bhots of Twan and Chasag Bhotori came from Myar Nala of Lahaul Spiti. The people of Sural valley have a local link with the people of Ghandari valley. The bhots of two villages named Sural Bhotori and Hundan Bhotori migrated from the Zansker range. Many people have migrated from Churah for the search of cultivable area came through two passes connecting Pangi with Churah.

Administrative History

Previously, as sub-tehsil, Pangi was under the controlling mechanism of Naib-Tehsildar. At that point of time, he was only associated with revenue related work. He did not have any administrative powers. He had to carry the work through his immediate authority Tehsildar sitting at Tissa. Sach Pass was the way to connect Tissa and Killar. It remains open only for three months. The small duration of working and poor communication means formed obstacles in the development process of Pangi valley. On 24 January 1975, Tehsildaar became the chief authority of Pangi. It speeded up the process of development. The office of additional Deputy Commissioner was formed in 1980. But the problems continued to be the same and this office was scratched in 1983. The major changes were in 1986. Single Line Administration was announced in this year. Single line administration is same at the level of district administration. Resident Commissioner is the highest authority of Pangi Valley. All the government departments will work under the direction of Residential Commissioner. There are some budgetary clauses for tribes of Himachal Pradesh. Many funds were diverted to Pangi but stood unutilized. The hard weather conditions allow pangi to work only for few months. Due to this reason, many time budget is processed for sanctioning. Slight construction work also takes a long time to complete. Tribal sub plan was endorsed during fifth five year plan for all five regions of Himachal Pradesh. These five regions were Pangi, Lahul, Spiti, Bharmaur, and Kinnaur. Pangi was one of them. Special central Assistance is also there for the development of the area.

Traditional agriculture and Livestock

Traditional agriculture mixed with livestock production is the backbone of the economy. The semi-arid climate is categorized by cool summers with little rain and severe winters. Heavy snowfall retains people restricted to their houses in winter. Most outdoor activities—such as crop cultivation, harvesting, threshing, animal grazing, and fodder and fuelwood collection—are carried out in the 5–6 summer months. Family members and domestic animals live at same storey during winter in their traditional house. They have to collect and store food, fodder and fuel for the winter early in the months of summer. People are also involved in livestock and orchard plantations. Animal husbandry is key for their livelihood. They followed a periodic form of nomadism moving with their sheep (sheeps and goats). The area of low altitudes and foothills yield different types of crops. They practised subsistence farming accompanied by animal husbandry. Some people have undertaken stepped agriculture. Apart from ploughing the land the people has started as casual labour for making the cash. This cash allows the people to buy subsidized ration. This has withdrawn the old persons involved in the agricultural activities. Tertiary sector is also a resource of making the living. Many people are working in government jobs. The land is cultivated by the owners and agricultural labourers are negligible.

Pangwala Society

The settled villages in the Sub tehsil are mostly located along the banks of River Chandra Bhaga and its tributaries. The riverbed level varies from about 7000 ft. to 8000 ft. and the village communities are mostly located at heights ranging between 7000-9000 ft. There are a few Batori (Bhot) villages which lie well above this height. During summer months inter-communication among various villages is possible on foot but during

winter months when snow covers the valley and the peaks all intercommunication stops with the result that each habitation becomes an isolated world by itself. Residents of Pangi Sub Tehsil are broadly speaking divided into two groups, the Pangwals and the Bhots. Pangwalas are the residents of Pangi Valley, which is the western part of the Sub Tehsil. Bhots are progenies of Indo-Tibetans who for ages have been living along the Indo-Tibet trade routes. The Pangwalas are the largest population group in the Sub Tehsil. In some of the villages, the entire population consists of the same ancestral. In larger size villages the inhabitants belong to two or three families. Joint family system is the customary way of life. The father and his children live under one roof and share their incomes. The family generally lives in a single building. Since the Kothi is used as the Kitchen. People do not generally come out of the Kothi during the winter. Fodder for the animals which are kept in the Kothi is acquired through a hole from a room just above the Kothi in which fodder for winter is kept. This feedstuff mostly consists of grass obtained during summer months from the hills and pastures.

The tribal people of Pangi are known as the *Pangwal*. Practically all the people live in small and isolated villages. The languages enunciated by the people are *Pangwali* and *Bhoti*. Both Hinduism and Buddhism are practiced in the valley. The high altitudinal villages of Pangi Valley are called *Bhatories* and their inhabitants are stated as "*bhots*." Mainly Pangwals and Bhots are two major identity of the region. Most of the villages are populated by Pangwal community and bhot are residing only in five villages known as Hundan Bhattori, Sural Bhattori, Parmar Bhattori, Chasak Bhattori and Hill Twan. The Pangwals have Indo-Aryan physical features and Bhots have Indo-Tibetan features.

Adjacent hills of Pangi Valley towards the southern side are visited frequently by wandering pastoralist tribal *Gaddis* with their herds. These people go to higher altitudes in summer along with their herds in search of grazing ground and pastures. They also collect different parts of various medicinal and aromatic plants for their earnings. Local songs, dance (*Nati* by gents and *Ghurei* by ladies), and locally made liquor "*paatar*," play an important role on the life style of the people of Pangi Valley. One of the major festivals celebrated in the mid of February is "*Jukaru*," urging to local god or deities with words of celebration and thanks for helping the people to live the harsh winter. In present time, Pangwali is written in Dev Nagri script. The bhot people speak bhotia language and also speak Pangwali while interacting with Pangwal. Very few Bhot people speak Ladakhi. The Pangwal people practice Hinduism and bhots follow Buddhism. The highest layers of Pangwala are Brahmins trailed by Rajputs. Brahmins and Rajput form the high caste groups. Bhots live in some sort of homogenous way. The bhots have been considered the higher to the lower caste of Pangwals. The society in Pangi valley has been organized at different levels family, clan and village. The eldest male person holds the higher position. In present time nuclear families are growing.

In earlier days, Chukri (*Eremurus himalaicus*) is also used for mixing with flour. It is sweet in taste. Their required nutrients have been compensated by consuming edible animal products. Bhares, Phullan, elo and barley, wheat and chiney are used. Chukri is a local plant and it is mixed with flour. The bread is prepared from it. Phullan and Bhares flour is used to make the bread. This bread is known as Thothe. The flour of elo is called Sattu. Sur is fermented from barley and wheat.

The religious traditions have great importance in the lives of the people. The myths based on the local stories are narrated till today. Hindus in Pangi worship many divinities. They worship many devis and Deotas. Naag and devis are prayed in the valley. Fairs are held every year on fixed date in these temples. Dehars are renovated after three years. There are mainly three functionaries in the village. The first one is known as Pujara. He performs Puja at the time on special occasion. The second local official is Chaila. The third representative is Rakha who takes care of the temple. The people also worship their descendants. They erect a pillar known as Dhoj in the memory of their ancestors. They worship it on the special occasion. Grih devta (god of home) and Gothe (god of pastures) are also prayed by the people. Buddhists pray Lord Buddha placed in the Gompa. Buddhist priests read and teach Buddhists scriptures on the special occasion.

Praja System

It is really hard to work on the land individually. The community based labour has been encouraged. At the village level all structure is based on the Praja System. One adult male member of each family is the forming part of the Praja. All the families have to follow rules endorsed by the Praja. If anybody fails to do like this, he has to be penalized. The Praja also resolves the conflicts in villages and between different villages. At village level, every adult person of each family forms the Praja. All the members of Praja have to follow the rules. One is accountable to fine if he is unable to perform the rules formulated by the Praja. Otherwise one has to be boycotted by the Praja. Praja is the best way of providing community labour and arranged the food during the work. Praja works as an intermediate of social interaction among the people. It works to bring the social harmony and coordination in the society.

The traditional village house has been built by stones, woods, kangas grass and bhajot and superior type of earth. The house walls are made of mix of soil, animal dung, chaff and water. Snowfall is very heavy in Pangi valley. People keep it clearing with the tool named as Kashi. The lower story of house is called Kothi where in one part people of the family live and in other section the domestic animals are kept. In summers these

livestock are sent to the grasslands. The lower section in the Kothi is used to keep the livestock whereas the upper part of house is used to store the fuelwood and bedding etc. One small section is also made to keep the small lambs. The other upper section is fully used by the family members for living purpose. Apart from it, a small ventilator is used as the source of light in winter. Jangani (twigs of chir) is also used traditionally to lighten the Kothi at midnight. Pangi houses are rectangular in shape.

Koet: There is one ventilation in the Koet. That ventilation is known as Twar. The height of the story is 6 and half feet and maximum 7 feet. There is one kitchen called Aat in second story. The place where feedstuff is stored is known as Madhi. The materials for house consist of wood, stone, Kangsi grass (some sort of grass does not allow the water), bhajot, and special type of soil called Rit. The stones are coated with gara made up of leaves of Chir, caw (busa of wheat).

The lower storey of the house is divided into two portions. The portion where animals are kept is known as Goeli. Aghal for sheeps and goats and the upper portion where woods are kept is known as tun. Small calves and lambs are kept in Chok (young calves and lambs). Kunhar is used by the people for sleeping and sitting. Udahn is constructed in between of Kunhar and Goeli. And the place where the grass is given to sheep and goats is called Agpath and where the grass is given to big animals is called Darel. Earlier Jagni is used to lighten the house on the stone.. Upper story is separated into two portions. Madhi is used to keep the fodder of the animals. Atti is a small kitchen. Bei is a common place of all three rooms. Ladh is the place for drying up the grass. Dhanwal is used to stock the milk. Chokdi is the front portion of the lower story. Prasan leads to another story of the house. Choubu is also fixed to go to another story. In the Hill Twan village, the first floor is meant exclusively for animals. The second floor is meant to live the human beings.

Dress

Traditional dress has been woven locally made of thick woolen cloth. The dress of male comprises of woolen shirt and woolen trousers known as Kamari and Challan. Woolen coat is known as likalh and a cloth around the waist is called majhan. The foot attires are made of wheat straw. The Puli are made up of wheat and barley straw. The Joji is made up of coloured cotton clothes. Females wear Kameej a full sleeve cotton shirt and a cotton trousers known as Challan. They also take a woolen shawl known as Chadru. The ornaments are made of Silver as well as gold.

Life Event Cycle

All the people join in the social celebration. They share happiness and sorrow with their fellow people.

Birth Ceremony

It is seen that birth of the male child is greeted. After the birth of the male child they go to deher for praying the deity and gives flower as the symbol for congratulations. The villagers and relatives come for congratulations. They bring some sort of eatables like Sattu and Puri dryfruits, fruits and sweets from the confectionaries. The cleansing ceremony is performed on 12th day of the birth. It is known as Baaro. After nine months the name of the child is named. The hairs are shaved by the maternal uncle. This ritual is called Mundan. The ritual on birth child in bhot society is known as Sangtantra.

Marriage

In some cases intermarriage among bhots and Pangwals takes place. There are different types of marriage in Pangi valley. **Mugali** is the kind of engagement. Boys take initiative through the most mature person called Diwan. Diwan, the boy, father or Brother and one and two relatives go to the home of the girl. Marriage between unmarried couples is initiated either-by an intermediary or a common relative. 'Pilam' is the first ceremony. It is something akin to betrothal. On this day the bridegroom's family sends presents to the bride's family. These presents consist of Rakh, Luchis and some ceremonial ornaments usually of silver. The boy presents the symbolic jewelry to the girl on this occasion. **Chakki Fakki** can be said the following stage of the marriage. In this ritual the boy, father, Diwan and three or more persons visit the village on fixed date. They also present monetary gifts to the girls. After Chaki Fakki they are publically acknowledged and they can live their private life. The third ceremony is the marriage proper. The 'Barat' is provided with food by the bride's family. There is a lot of local dancing and singing and the party then returns home along with the bride. On return journey brother of the bridegroom is known as Patwara. Five to seven relatives accompany the bride. **Jani Biyah** is final marriage ritual. The volume of dowry is a subject of economic conditions of girl family. If a man wishes to divorce the lady he offers the money and symbolically breaks the dry stick over the head of the lady. The husband also breaks the dry stick on the amount of money. After then she is free to merry. **Pit Chuk** means carrying on the back. It is a marriage by capture. If the girls drinks water and eats with in one day, it is understood that she has given her accord. The second system of marriage is the 'Chori System'. A boy lifts an unmarried girl and takes her home. If the girl refuses to take food for 24 hours, she is returned *with* her parents. If, however, she takes food that is taken to be an indication of consent. Thereafter the marriage is celebrated as

usual. **Top deni** is the marriage with widow. The marriage with widow is called Topi Lani. The interested male places the cap on the head of the widow with whom she wants to marry in presence of some elder persons. A child born after the Pilam ritual is considered legitimate. Divorce is a recognised practice. If a married woman runs away with some person, then the person she flees with has to pay to the former husband. This settles the matter.

Death

The dying person is laid down on the floor. Every member of family drips the gee in the mouth of the person. Baruhie does the work of information among Praja. Kui is a girl who does special ritual like eating the food earlier for three days. It is assumed that the food will transmit to the deceased person. Lieuti is a woman washes all the clothes. New traditional cloths are also worn to the deceased person. Coins are dispersed among people who play tunes. On the third day the puja is performed. People keep the fast every month on the date of the demise and the feast is given after completion of one year. In bhot family the Lama visits in the house of the deceased person and computes the time of cremating. This process is known as Sih. The ceremony is performed named Zende in the evening of cremation. The corpus is kept in sitting mode on the fire.

When a death takes place, the entire Praja gathers at the house of the bereaved family. Kins from other parts of the valley also reach. The dead body is taken to the Shamshan and is cremated. On the third day after the death a Brahman is called and old clothes of the deceased are handed over to him. One month of three months after the date of passing, as may suit the family of the dead, a general feast is arranged in the name of the deceased. It is for this day that the family keeps in reserve the best of its available food supplies which include ghee sometimes scores of years old. Liquor is not consumed on this day. For one year after death the family remains in grief and no marriage takes place in the family.

Conclusion

At the identity level it is important to know distinct traditional know how of natural environment of tribal identity. This tribal identity is carrying intangible cultural heritage practices and local knowledge. The understanding is the most of traditional customary practices have to be preserved. Many forces of modernization has eroded local traditional customary practices. Intangible cultural heritage practices and local knowledge are under challenges. The way the village society is linked to outside world has put the impact on local culture. The compression of space and time has changed. There is the tendency of globalisation of culture mixing global with the local. It is not spontaneous. The globalisation has touched the all areas of human activity and local culture is not exception in this regard.

Reference

- [1]. Aye, K. V., & Sangtam, K. V. (2018). Customary laws and traditional system of administration with special reference to Sumi tribal chief. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 7(10), 30–36.
- [2]. Bose, R. (Majumdar). (2016). Changing lives of Birhors in Purulia: A socio-economic observation in twenty-first century. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 8(2), 206–219.
- [3]. Brown, G. G., & Barnett, J. H. (1942). Social organization and social structure. *American Anthropologist*, 44, 31–36.
- [4]. Chakroborthy, Krishna 2002. *Family in India*. Rawat: New Delhi.
- [5]. Dube, Leela 1974. *Sociology of Kinship*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay
- [6]. Durkheim, E. (1893). *The division of labour in society*. (W. D. Halls, Trans., Introduction by Lewis A. Coser). New York, NY: Free Press.
- [7]. Goode, W.J., 1965. *The Family*. Prentice Hall, New Delhi.
- [8]. Government of India. 1961. *Census of India 1961*. Ministry of Broadcasting and Publication: New Delhi.
- [9]. Krishna, A. (2002). *Active social capital*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- [10]. Logan, C. (2009). Selected chiefs, elected councillors, and hybrid democrats: Popular perspectives on the coexistence of democracy and traditional authority. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47(1), 101–128. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- [11]. Negi, T.S. (1976). *Scheduled tribe of Himachal Pradesh*. Shimla: DK Publishers.
- [12]. Pur, K. A., & Moore, M. (2010). Ambiguous institutions: Traditional governance and local democracy in rural South India. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 46(4), 603–623.
- [13]. Singh, R. C. P. (Ed.). (1964). *Census of India 1961 Volume XX-Part VI-No.7 Himachal Pradesh A village survey Kupha, Parmas, Thamoh and Malet*. Himachal Pradesh: Superintendent of Census Operations.
- [14]. Srinivas, M. N. (1955). *The social system of a Mysore village*. In M. Marriott (Ed.), *Village India*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- [15]. Vaidya, K. L. (1977). *The cultural heritage of the Himalayas*. New Delhi, India: National.

Dr. Rakesh Thakur and Surender Singh. "An Ethnographical Reflection on Pangwala Tribe." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 11(11), 2022, pp 33-37. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722